

The Role of Religion in America's History and Culture:  
Twelve Lesson Plans for Middle and Secondary Teachers

Developed by Toni Bishop, Carol Hill, Robin Reid, and Angene Wilson

With a grant from the  
PERK (Public Education and Religion in Kentucky) committee

### Background to Project:

When two of the curriculum developers heard former Governor Brereton Jones report on the work of the PERK (Public Education and Religion in Kentucky) committee in December 1999, our responses as ninth grade teacher of Law and Justice and teacher educator were positive. The ninth grade teacher said: "I already use almost all the documents or primary sources which their brochure lists." The teacher educator said: "How could we help more teachers include religion in their teaching of history and government?"

In May 2000, after receiving a small grant of \$1200.00 from the PERK committee, four of us organized to write lesson plans over the summer that would be helpful for social studies teachers in grades eight through twelve, mostly in U.S. history or government. Toni Bishop teaches American Studies to juniors at Scott County High School. Carol Hill has taught at Bluegrass Baptist and Jessamine County High Schools and has worked with student teachers and interns through the University of Kentucky for many years; she is currently finishing her doctoral dissertation. Robin Reid teaches Law and Justice to freshmen at Lafayette High School in Fayette County. Angene Wilson is a social studies teacher educator at the University of Kentucky; she teaches the secondary social studies methods course and supervises student teachers.

After we looked over each other's lesson plans in August 2000, we decided to try them out in classrooms in fall 2000. We also presented our plans at a Kentucky Council of Social Studies session in September 2000 and to the 2000-2001 teacher education students in December 2000.

Finally, in February 2001, we are ready to present these plans for teachers in Kentucky. We look forward to feedback. Of course, religion and schools is a national issue. We are submitting a proposal to present our curriculum at the National Council for the Social Studies annual meeting in Washington, DC in November 2001.

### Resources for Project:

After reading the "Education about the Role of Religion in America's History and Culture" brochure, we began to look at other resources. *Finding Common Ground* by Charles Haynes and Oliver Thomas, from the First Amendment Center in Nashville, Tennessee, was especially helpful in suggesting objectives and a frame of reference. Their brief *Teaching about Religion in American Life: A First Amendment Guide* is a wonderful starting point.

*Constitutional Debates on Freedom of Religion, a Documentary History*, edited by John J. Patrick and Gerald P. Long, and published by Greenwood Press, is a comprehensive source divided into five parts: colonial roots of religious liberty, 1606-1776; religious liberty in the founding of the United States, 1776-1791; the constitutional right to free exercise of religion, 1791-1991; the constitutional prohibition of an establishment of religion, 1791-1991; and constitutional issues of freedom of religion,

1991-1998. Examples of the range of documents are: the Maryland Toleration Act of 1649, The Federalist 51, Wisconsin v. Yoder (1972), The Equal Access Act (1984), and President Clinton's statement on religious expression in Public Schools (July 13, 1995).

A particularly helpful website ([www.nhc.rtp.nc.us:8080/tserve/divan.htm](http://www.nhc.rtp.nc.us:8080/tserve/divan.htm)) is the National Humanities Center's "Divining America: Religion and the National Culture" which has balanced essays that raise good questions. It was one source for the lessons on the Jewish and Catholic immigrant experiences. The websites Americanreligion.org and religiousolerance.org are recommended for the lessons on minority religions and Native American religion.

Both the PERK website ([www.p-e-r-k.org](http://www.p-e-r-k.org)) and another site, American documents for the study of history ([http://kuhttp.cc.ukans.edu/carrie/docs/amdocs\\_index.html](http://kuhttp.cc.ukans.edu/carrie/docs/amdocs_index.html)) provide historical documents for teachers and students. They are used in the lessons on religious freedom cases, historical document analysis, and creating a historical display case. Books which were helpful in developing those lessons include George Bundy Smith and Alene L. Smith, *You Decide! Applying the Bill of Rights to Real Cases*, Critical Thinking Press and Software, 1992; Michael J. Terry, *Government in American Supreme Court Decisions*, Houghton Mifflin, 1993; William McClenaghan, *MacGruder's American Government*, Prentice Hall, 1994; and the Center for Civic Education's *We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution*, 1995.

A new series entitled *Religion in American Life* is published by Oxford University Press. As one example, *African-American Religion*, by Albert J. Raboteau, includes the independent African church movement, religion among the slaves, emancipation, religion in the city, the black freedom struggle, and black faith in recent years. A glossary, timeline, pictures, and further reading list supplement a narrative that middle and high schoolers would find engaging.

### Our Approach:

Because we think the role of religion in history and culture is often left out of our curriculum and often misunderstood, we begin with lessons which introduce the topic of religion in American society and government and consider the context for teaching religion in the public schools. We recognize religion can be a controversial topic and understand that some teachers may find it easier to use some lesson plans than others.

Our lesson plans are organized in a logical order if a teacher wished to do a unit on religion, but we expect that many teachers will use lessons that fit into their current curriculum. So "Religious Freedom Cases" may be taught in a government class, "Religion in Kentucky" in Kentucky Studies, "Jewish and Catholic Immigrant Experiences" and in U.S. History, and "Minority Religions" in a sociology class. The lesson on "Religious Art Symbols" is an opportunity to bring the humanities into social studies.

## Table of Contents:

Introduction to Religion in American Society and Government

What is the Proper Context for Teaching Religion in Public Schools?

Religious Freedom Cases

Historical Document Analysis

Creating a Historical Display Case

Religion in Kentucky – Working with Primary Sources

The Black Church in Kentucky

Native American Religions

Jewish Immigrant Experiences

Catholic Immigrant Experiences

Minority Religions in America

Religious Art Symbols

We would like very much to have feedback.

Toni Bishop (Scott County High School) [tbishop@scott.k12.ky.us](mailto:tbishop@scott.k12.ky.us) for “What is the Proper Context for Teaching Religion in Public Schools and Jewish and Catholic Immigrant Experiences

Carol Hill (University of Kentucky) [chill5191@aol.com](mailto:chill5191@aol.com) for Native American Religions, Minority Religions, and Religious Art Symbols

Robin Reid (Lafayette High School) [rreid@fayette.k12.ky.us](mailto:rreid@fayette.k12.ky.us) for Religious Freedom Cases, Historical Document Analysis, and Creating a Historical Display Case.

Angene Wilson (University of Kentucky ) [cpd458@pop.uky.edu](mailto:cpd458@pop.uky.edu) for Introduction to Religion in American Society and Government, Religion in Kentucky, and the Black Church in Kentucky.

